

## Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Samuel P. Langley, February 15, 1902

February 15, 1902. prof. S. P. Langley, Smithsonian Institution. Dear Prof. Langley: —

I think I returned to you personally the other day the cutting from the Boston Journal of February 9, containing the account of the reported kite ascension in Boston. A very similar account containing very similar illustrations was sent to me last December, and is preserved in my scrap book. Unfortunately the sender failed to state the name of the paper from which it was taken, or its date, but I received it in December 1901. The article is entitled “An Adventuresome Girl who Flies in a Kite”, and the girl is stated to be “Miss Almenia Rice, wife of Dan Rice, Jr., the Circus Clown.” &c.

I am very much inclined to look upon the reported ascension as a newspaper story for advertising purposes. Though doubtless the kite would fly, I doubt very much whether it would carry up a girl, especially with the weight placed for astern. In my own experiments in Beinn Bhreagh the load had to be placed in the front end of the kite in order that the kite should fly any where nearly horizontal. The weight of a girl at the stern of such a kite as that shown would surely depress the stern to an impracticable degree.

In the account which I have the writer says: -

“Several trial trips have already been made at Boston, Mrs. Rice, attired as a boy, standing in a small basket, which suspended from the kite acted as a tail.”

While of course it might be possible for a kite to carry a basket suitably attached to the kite, it is extremely improbable to my mind that the kite would fly properly with a basket attached to the stern and acting as a tail — more especially if the basket were loaded with the weight of a woman.

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Upon the whole, I look upon this as A TAIL (!) of a kite, and nothing more.

Yours sincerely, Alexander Graham Bell P. S. There is an article in the New York Sun, Sunday, February 2, 1902, headed "Flying Machine in ten years". Sir Hiram Maxim's prediction- To have a try at the game himself". I notice that Sir Hiram says that aluminum alloyed with a small percentage of magnesium "is lighter than pure aluminum, and that it has the tensile strength and stiffness of wrought iron. Thus the engineer is put in possession of a very light and powerful motor, and a light and strong material quite unobtainable only a few years ago." A.G.B.